



BUTTON MEN™



A mean little dice game for two players

Button Men was introduced in 1999. Over the next few years, more than 200 different characters were created with a variety of rules and themes. The basic idea is simple: each fighter is represented by five polyhedral dice. Players take turns rolling dice and capturing each other's dice.

Button Men was a hit at game conventions and online. It won two Origins Awards: Best Abstract Board Game and Best Graphic Presentation of a Board Game of 1999. A few years later, Button Men Online won the Origins Award for Best Play by Mail Game.

This rulebook presents the basics of Button Men. For more information, strategy tips, character data, and history, visit www.beatpeopleup.com.

The Basics:

Players: 2

Playing Time: 10 minutes and up.

Equipment: One Button Men character for each player, and several polyhedral dice.

Summary of Play: Players fight several rounds, rolling dice and capturing each other's dice. The first player to win three rounds wins the game.

The Dice:

Each fighter uses several dice of different sizes and types, as specified by the numbers on the artwork. As a rule, smaller dice mean *speed*, and large dice mean *strength*.

"X" is a variable die, or "Swing Die." You may use any die between 4 and 20 sides for an "X." If a character has more than one "X," each of those dice must be the same size.

In casual play, you can always change your Swing Dice between rounds. In a tournament, each player chooses his starting dice in secret, and only the loser of each round may change.

The Game:

To Begin: Roll all of your fighter's dice, and arrange your dice so they can be easily read. Players will now take turns.

Whoever rolled the single lowest number will go first. If the lowest dice are tied, compare the next lowest dice, and so on until a starting player is determined. If all numbers are tied, the game is a draw.

On Your Turn: You must make an attack if you can. The basic attacks are *Power* and *Skill*. Other attacks are permitted by other dice, described on page 3.

Power Attack: Use one of your dice to capture one of your opponent's dice. The value showing on your die must be *greater than or equal to* the value showing on the die you capture. Take the captured die out of play, and re-roll the capturing die.

Skill Attack: Use one or more of your dice to capture one of your opponent's dice. In this case, the values showing on your dice must *add up exactly* to the value showing on the die you capture. Remove the captured die from play, and re-roll all the capturing dice.

Passing: Passing means skipping your turn. You may not pass unless you cannot make any legal attack. When both players pass, the round is over.

Scoring: Calculate your score as follows:

For each die you captured, you score its *size* in points. For example, a captured 8-sided die is worth 8 points. For each die of your own which you kept, you score half its size. So, keeping your 8-sided die is worth only 4 points. The highest score wins the round, and the first player to win three rounds wins the game.

If any round is a draw, re-play it.

Button Men was designed by James Ernest. Character art in this rulebook is by Brian Snöddy. Button Men Logo designed by E. Jordan Bojar. Button Men is © 1999, 2011 Cheapass Games Seattle WA: www.cheapass.com. Visit the official fan site at www.beatpeopleup.com.

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Games

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To learn more, read the last page of this document, or visit www.cheapass.com.

Example of Play:

Here is an example game between Bill and Sarah. Their dice are as follows, based on two characters from the Soldiers set:

Bill: 4 4 6 20 20 (Shore)
Sarah: 6 10 10 12 16 (Niles)

Below are their starting rolls. From this point on, only the values of the dice will be shown.

Bill: 2 4 5 13 18
Sarah: 2 2 6 9 13

Sarah will go first because she rolled the lowest number, not counting the first pair of 2's, which cancel out.

Sarah would like to take Bill's 18, but she can't add up to 18 exactly, and she can't overpower it with a single die. She could take Bill's 13 in two ways: a power attack with her 13, or a skill attack using her 9, 2, and 2.

Sarah decides to take Bill's 13 with a skill attack. She removes the captured 13 from play, and re-rolls her 9, 2, and 2. After the re-roll, they become a 1, 5, and 10.

Now it's Bill's turn.

Bill: 2 4 5 18
Sarah: 1 5 6 10 13

Looking ahead, Bill notices that if he lets Sarah keep her 13 and her 5, she will be able to take his 18 on her next turn.

Bill can't take Sarah's 13 without re-rolling the 18, which is a dangerous move. His best play is to protect his 18 by taking Sarah's 5 in a power attack with his own 5.

Bill: 2 4 7 18
Sarah: 1 6 10 13

Sarah's goal is to "call out" Bill's 18, which means forcing him to attack with it. This means making her own dice values as large as possible while reducing Bill's options. She makes a Skill attack, taking Bill's 7 with her 1 and 6.

Bill: 2 4 18
Sarah: 5 6 10 13

This is a bad situation for Bill. Sarah can now make 18 by adding 13 and 5. Bill can't take the 5 or the 13 without rolling the 18. His best move is to take the 13 with the 18, and hope that his large die is still safe. And so it continues.

In the end, Sarah captures all of Bill's dice and keeps her own 6-sided die. Her score is $(4 + 4 + 6 + 20 + 20 + 3 = 57)$ where the 3 is half of her own 6-sided die. Bill's score is $(10 + 10 + 12 + 16 = 48)$, for the four of Sarah's dice that he captured. Before they play again, Bill can change his Swing (the 6) to another size.

Character List:

This list contains the basic recipes for the Soldiers, Vampyres, and Brom sets. You can play the game just by using this list, or you can acquire the printed characters by several methods.

All these characters are free for download in trading card form (rectangular JPGs) from www.cheapass.com. Some of them can be purchased as individual buttons from the cheapass store at cafepress.com/cheapass. And of course some of the original retail buttons are still floating around out there.

Rules for all the special dice listed below are on the next page.

Soldiers:

The original Button Men set was called "Soldiers" and contained twelve characters and one "rare" drawn by Brian Snöddy.

CAG 301	Avis:	4 4 10 12 X	Hammer:	6 12 20 20 X
CAG 302	Bauer:	8 10 12 20 X	Stark:	4 6 8 X X
CAG 303	Kith:	6 8 12 12 X	Clare:	6 8 8 20 X
CAG 304	Karl:	4 6 6 20 X	Iago:	20 20 20 X
CAG 305	Niles:	6 10 10 12 X	Shore:	4 4 20 20 X
CAG 306	Hannah:	8 10 10 10 X	Kublai:	4 8 12 20 X
Rare:	Changeling:	X X X X X		

Vampyres:

Another set with art by Brian Snöddy, Vampyres was a six-character set that introduced the first special dice, Shadow Dice (s).

CAG 307	Angel:	4s 6 12s 12 X	Buddy:	6s 10 20s 20 X
CAG 308	Tiffany:	4 8s 8 10 Xs	McGinty:	4 10s 12 12 X
CAG 309	Dunkirk:	6 6 10 20 Xs	Starchylde:	6s 8 10s 12 X

Brom:

As the title implies, this set was illustrated by Gerald Brom. This is a 12-character set with two rares, designed by Nik Sauer and James Ernest.

The Brom set introduced Poison Dice (p) and the V Swing.

CAG 310	Coil:	4p 12 20p 20 V
	Bane:	2p 4p 12 12 V
CAG 311	Lucky:	6 10 12p 20 X
	Shepherd:	8 8 16p 20 X
CAG 312	Peace:	10s 12s 20s Xs Xs
	Crusher:	10 20p 20 20 X
CAG 313	Grist:	4p 8 10 12 X
	Wastenott:	4s 8s 10s 20s Xs
CAG 314	Reaver:	4 10 10 12 Xp
	Jellybean:	20p 20s V X
CAG 315	Bluff:	6sp 12sp 16 20 X
	Strik:	8 10p 16s 16 X
Rare 1:	Echo:	? ? ? ? ?
		<i>Echo's basic recipe matches that of her opponent.</i>
Rare 2:	Giant:	20 20 20 20 20 20
		<i>Giant never goes first.</i>



Dice Types:

Here is a list of the most common die types in Button Men, including the Poison and Shadow dice listed in Vampyres and Brom, as well as some other common types.

Basic Dice: Unless stated as otherwise, all dice in Button Men are “basic dice.”

A “die” is a randomizer that chooses integers between 1 and its size with equal frequency. This means that a 1-sided die always rolls 1. A pi-sided die is exactly the same as a 3-sided die. A 0-sided die does not roll, but what it does not roll is 1. (Go ahead, argue with me.)



Swing Dice: Swing Dice have a variable size. A player can choose any size at the beginning of the game. Only the loser of each round can change Swing Dice between rounds. Different letters of Swing Dice can vary between different boundaries, as follows:



R: 2 to 16	U: 8 to 30	X: 4 to 20
S: 6 to 20	V: 6 to 12	Y: 1 to 20
T: 2 to 12	W: 4 to 12	Z: 4 to 30

Note that any value in the given range is a legal size for Swing dice. Thus, it is possible to have 7-, 9-, 13-, or 29-sided dice as long as those numbers are within a Swing die’s limits.

You can simulate any sized die simply by using a larger die and re-rolling all results that are outside the appropriate range.

Turbo Swing Dice: A Turbo Swing Die is indicated by a letter followed by a “!”, such as “X!”.

Before the game, a Turbo Swing can be any size in the allowable range. During the game, whenever you re-roll a Turbo Swing you may choose a new size for it.

In a tournament, if you are not allowed to change Swing Dice, your Turbo must start the round with the same value that it started the last round.



Mood Swing Dice: A Mood Swing Die is indicated by a letter followed by “?”, such as “X?”.

Before the game, a Mood Swing can be any size in the allowable range. During the game, whenever you re-roll a Mood Swing it will randomly change size.

Mood Swings always choose from among all common die sizes (not all integers) with equal probability. The definition of “common” die sizes is 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, and 20.



Option Dice: Option Dice look like fractions. They are represented as two numbers within a circular frame, separated by a horizontal line.



Option Dice function like Swing Dice, and can be changed at any time that a Swing Die could be changed. However, they can only take one of the two values shown.

For example a 4/12 Option Die could be either a 4 or a 12.

Shadow Dice: Shadow Dice are usually indicated by an “s” on the frame, but in the Vampyres set they were designated with a horizontal line over the number.



Shadow Dice are normal in all respects, except that they can not make Power Attacks. Instead, they can make inverted Power Attacks, called *Shadow Attacks*.

Shadow Attack: Use one of your Shadow Dice to capture one of your opponent’s dice. The target die must show a value equal to or greater than the attacking die, but within its range. For example, a Shadow 12 showing 7 can capture any value between 7 and 12.

Shadow Dice can make Skill Attacks normally.

Poison Dice: A Poison Die is indicated by a “p” on the frame.



Poison Dice are worth negative points. If you keep one of your own Poison Dice, you subtract its full size from your score. If you capture an opponent’s Poison Die, subtract half its size.

Poison Shadow Dice: When dice have the Poison and Shadow abilities, they make attacks like Shadow Dice and are scored like Poison Dice.

Speed Dice: Speed Dice are marked with a lightning bolt on the frame. Speed Dice are normal in all respects, except that they have an additional attack called a Speed Attack. This is basically an inverted Skill attack.



Speed Attack: Use one Speed die to capture any number of your opponent’s dice. The dice you capture must add up exactly to the value of the Speed die. Re-roll the Speed Die and take the captured dice out of play.

Twin Dice: Twin Dice have two numbers within a figure-eight frame. They are played as two dice that are rolled together and added together.



For example, a Twin 8 is represented as (8,8) and is treated as a single die that can roll values between 2 and 16. The two 8s are rolled as one, captured as one, and scored as one die worth 16 points.

The list goes on and on. The types listed above are found in the Button Men expansions from Cheapass Games. Others included Trip Dice, Focus Dice, Auxiliary Dice, Queer Dice, and Warrior Dice, just to name a few.

Free? Seriously?

Tell me a little more about that.

Okay, here's the deal. If I made a great game and sold it to you for ten bucks, I'd probably keep about a dollar. If I sold it to a big game company, they'd probably make a nicer version for thirty bucks, and I'd still get about a dollar.

The rest of your money would go to printers, distributors, retail stores, and freight companies. And most of those guys don't know anything about what makes a great game.

Mass-producing entertainment is a gamble. It's a convoluted way for creators to protect their intellectual property, by selling it in a way that is prohibitively expensive to counterfeit. And it's getting a little old.

Why do you pay \$30 for a board game? The story goes like this: the retail price of a game covers the cost of manufacturing it, and there is no way you could make your own copy for that price, to say nothing of the hassle of finding little wooden men in six colors. So, it's worth \$30 because it costs \$30, QED.

But the value in a board game isn't the manufacturing cost. It's the play value. Unfortunately, this means that some games are priced way out of whack with what they are worth. And because the big gamble doesn't always work out, some of your money helps pay for the stuff that goes straight to the dump.

I've decided to try a different gamble. I'm giving my games away for free. This way, you can read the rules, make a copy, and even play the thing, before you decide what it's worth.

If you do like my games, I hope you will send me some money. But I'm also hoping you will share this experiment with your friends. You are my sales force, my marketing department, my demo team.

You're also my testers, so if you can think of ways to improve my games, please share them with me. I'm easy to find at big gaming conventions, and even easier online. Look for Cheapass Games on Facebook, or drop me a line at cheapassjames@gmail.com.

If we do this right, we will get famous and do shaving ads. But more importantly, we will prove that there is a better way for a creator to profit from his work.

And nothing has to go to the dump.

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